

amendment, filed on July 13, 1995, the preferred pH range for the aqueous etching solution is 7 or higher. The inventive process does not require multi-stage etching wherein both acidic and alkaline aqueous solutions are used. In the pending Office Action, the Examiner appears to concede that the prior art, notably the Japanese reference, employs a two step process, using both acidic and alkaline solutions. Nevertheless, the Examiner rejected the claims on the basis that the claims apparently did not distinguish over the prior art, in this respect.

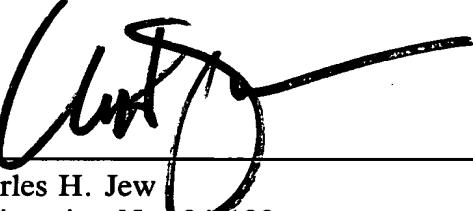
Applicants submit that the subject invention, as defined by the amended claims, whereby in the etching step, the aqueous solution consists of one that has a pH of 7 or higher, neither is taught nor suggested by the prior art. Furthermore, in view of the amendments to the claims, Applicants submit that Lowenheim, which apparently disclosed the use of chelating agents as substitutes for phosphates in alkaline cleaners, actually teaches away from the inventive process. Furthermore, there is no suggestion in Lowenheim that the concentration of the chelating agents in the aqueous etching solution be as high as 0.005 mol/lit. or from 0.005 mol/lit to 0.5 mol/lit. as defined in claims 9 and 10, respectively.

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For the foregoing reasons, Applicants submit that the pending claims define novel and unobvious subject matter and an early Notice of Allowance is respectfully requested.

Respectfully submitted,

BURNS, DOANE, SWECKER & MATHIS

By: 

Charles H. Jew
Registration No. 34,192
Menlo Park CA Office

Post Office Box 1404
Alexandria, Virginia 22313-1404
(415) 854-7400

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